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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL,
AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Concluding observations of the Committee
on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICELAND

1. The Committee considered the initial report of Iceland (E/1990/5/Add.6 and E/1990/5/Add.14) concerning the rights covered by articles 1 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 30th to 32nd meetings, held on 25 and 26 November 1993 and adopted* the following comments:

A. Introduction

2. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the State party for its detailed report, which has been prepared in accordance with the Committee's guidelines, and for engaging in a constructive dialogue with the Committee. It notes with satisfaction that the information submitted in the report and that provided by the delegation in reply to both written and oral questions in the course of consideration of the report, enabled the Committee to obtain a comprehensive view of Iceland's compliance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Committee appreciates the submission by the Government of Iceland of written replies to its list of issues. The Committee considers that the form and content of the dialogue established between the Government of Iceland and the Committee can be considered as a model. The Committee, however, regrets that the initial report was submitted with considerable delay.

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* At the 46th meeting (ninth session), held on 8 December 1993.

B. Positive aspects

3. The Committee welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Government of Iceland in order to implement the rights recognized in the Covenant. It notes with satisfaction that the Government of Iceland pays a great deal of attention in its activities to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the obligations undertaken under article 2 of the Covenant and that the Government has in recent years enacted a series of important laws of direct relevance to these rights.

4. In that regard, the Committee notes with particular satisfaction that the Law No. 28/1991 on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men secures equal rights of men and women in general, and not only with regard to remuneration, as had been the case before the adoption of that law. The Committee also notes with interest the establishment of the Equal Rights Council with the aim of ensuring the proper implementation of the Equal Rights Law and forming the policies to be followed by the authorities in matters concerning gender equality. The Committee also welcomes the establishment of a Committee to hear and investigate complaints relating to alleged instances of gender discrimination. The Committee noted with interest, in the context of the measures undertaken to implement provisions of articles 3 and 7 of the Covenant, the work being carried out by the Icelandic Wage Investigation Committee and the adoption by the Government in 1988, on the initiative of the Equal Status Council and the Ministry of Social Affairs, of the equal opportunity programmes to be implemented by ministries and State institutions.

5. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the range and quality of the services provided to the whole population, including particularly the elderly, in relation to social security, protection of the family, health care and education.

6. The Committee appreciates the amendments to the legislation concerning unemployment insurance (Law 69/1993), which, in contrast to previous legislation, extends benefits also to non-members of a trade union. It also appreciates information according to which, at current, all workers between age 16 and 71, resident in Iceland, are entitled to the unemployment benefits, the only condition being that they have worked in the previous 12 months for a total of no less than 425 hours in insurable employment and that benefits have been extended to the self-employed.

C. Factors and difficulties impeding the application of the Covenant

7. The Committee is aware of the difficulties encountered by Iceland with regard to the full implementation of the right to strike embodied in article 8 of the Covenant, which the State party attributes to the fact that the economy of Iceland is heavily dependent upon fishing. In view of the Committee, this circumstance does not relieve the State party of its obligation to take steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant, including the right to strike.

D. Principal subject of concern

8. The Committee notes that, in spite of numerous legislative measures undertaken to ensure equality between the sexes, inequality between men and women still exists in practice, especially in relation to the rights recognized in articles 6 and 7 of the Covenant. The Committee encourages the Government to continue its endeavours to eliminate the persisting disparities in relation to remuneration for men and women.

E. Suggestions and recommendations

9. The Committee recommends that the State party should accord equal treatment to both International Human Rights Covenants in terms of their domestic legal status and that if measures are taken to incorporate civil and political rights treaty obligations consideration is given to similar measures in relation to economic, social and cultural rights.

10. The Committee emphasizes that further measures should be taken to ensure that the provisions of the Covenant are more widely disseminated, particularly among the legal profession and members of the judiciary.

11. The Committee urges that the reporting obligations of the State party under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant be strictly observed and that the second periodic report be submitted within the time-limit to be determined by the Committee.